

West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission

Wheeling University Site Visit Overview and Proposed Timeline

At the Commission meeting on June 14, 2019, the agenda item for annual reauthorization of Wheeling Jesuit University, now Wheeling University, was postponed pending the receipt of additional information from the institution. Minutes before the August 2, 2019, special meeting of the Commission to consider Wheeling's reauthorization, Commission members learned President Mihalyo and Chief of Staff Petrella were placed on administrative leave. Given the uncertainty of the situation at Wheeling, the Commission postponed reauthorization until Commission staff could complete an on-campus evaluation of the university.

The site visit was conducted August 13-14, 2019 with staff members from Academic Affairs, Finance, Legal and Financial Aid departments. Staff interviewed senior administrators, faculty, staff and students from Wheeling University. Among the findings, the site team reports the following:

- The institution has ineffectively managed its finances and has run a deficit for several years. These deficits were generated in part by the failure to enact curricular, enrollment and staffing efficiencies. Additionally, excessive tuition discounts of up to 72 percent resulted in a large number of students on campus who were not covering their cost of attendance.
- Given its current financial situation and enrollment, the long-term financial sustainability of the institution is uncertain. For the coming academic year; however, due to a \$2 million-dollar unrestricted gift from the Diocese of Wheeling-Charleston and an available line of credit, the institution has demonstrated it can maintain operations for the coming year. However, without a restructuring of financial and administrative operations, in addition to an infusion of cash through a successful capital campaign, the promise of continued financial support from the Diocese or both, the institution does not currently demonstrate it has the means to sustain past the 2019-2020 academic year.
- The governance of the university is in a state of flux since President Mihalyo was placed on administrative leave. At the time of the Commission staff site visit, there appeared to be no long-term strategic plan to move the institution forward. According to senior administrators at Wheeling University, because President Mihalyo is still an employee of the university, they cannot appoint an interim president. Therefore, the university is using a "leadership team" rather than a single spokesperson or leader. The long-term administrative oversight of the school must be solidified in the very near future.
- Commission staff cannot determine whether Wheeling University will remain in good standing with the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). The HLC will make a

ruling on the status of the institutional accreditation at some point during the coming year. The HLC is expected to review similar areas of concern including academic oversight, financial stability and institutional governance.

- The National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) is conducting an investigation into the basketball program and booster activity. That investigation is expected to be concluded at some point during the upcoming academic year.
- Students in the teach-out phase of those academic programs that were terminated as a result of financial exigency have not been fully informed how the teach-out will occur. While the institution has promised a full teach-out, students with whom we met did not know who would be teaching their classes, when the classes were being offered and were concerned many of the courses would actually be independent studies, rather than classroom-based.

Wheeling University has a longstanding tradition of student success and contribution to the community and state. Its history and its impact in the region cannot be overlooked when considering its future viability.

The last few years have been a struggle for the institution and significant financial, administrative and academic challenges remain. Those challenges – and unfavorable outcomes for the institution's current students – would be exacerbated if the Commission did not provide the institution the opportunity to right its ship in the coming year. Given the university has a presumed financial path forward for the coming academic year, it is recommended that authorization to confer degrees for Wheeling University is effective until Friday, May 22, 2020 provided the following conditions and deadlines are met:

August 23, 2019

- Wheeling University must provide the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs with viable, HLC-approved teach-out plans for academic programs that have already been terminated as a result of the public declaration of financial exigency.

September 13, 2019

- Wheeling University shall provide to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs a formal strategic plan for the instance of institutional closure including viable teach-out plans for all remaining academic programs.

October 18, 2019

- A full report establishing the sustained financial viability of the institution for a period of at least five-years shall be provided to the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the Vice Chancellor for Finance.

November 22, 2019

- Wheeling University shall provide the Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs and the Vice Chancellor for Finance with an updated financial report and enrollment projections for the spring semester.

These obligations are established under authority of Series 52, Legislative Rule, Annual Reauthorization of Degree-Granting Institutions:

10.2.d "The Commission shall revoke the authority of an institution to confer degrees at any time when the institution's governing body, chief executive officer or both have done any one or more of the following:

... 10.2.d.2 Refused or willingly failed to provide information to the Commission in a manner and within a reasonable timeframe as established by the Commission."

Pursuant to West Virginia Code §18B-4-7, the Commission also may request any additional information or materials related to authorization from Wheeling University as deemed necessary. Failure to adhere to the above conditions and deadlines will result in the loss of authorization.

Wheeling University must remain in good standing with the Higher Learning Commission and share with the Commission written and electronic communication between the institution and the HLC regarding its status. Loss of regional accreditation will result in the immediate loss of authorization to confer degrees. Wheeling University must notify the Commission of any actions or sanctions from the HLC, U.S. Department of Education, NCAA, or any programmatic accrediting body.

Commission staff shall keep the Commission apprised of the university's compliance with the above conditions.

Proposed Resolution for Approval of Annual Reauthorization of Wheeling University on August 16, 2019:

Resolved, That the West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission approves the Annual Reauthorization for Wheeling University until May 22, 2020, conditioned upon the university satisfying the Commission's requirements for information reporting and communication, and the Commission's assessment of the university's financial stability, viability and academic integrity.